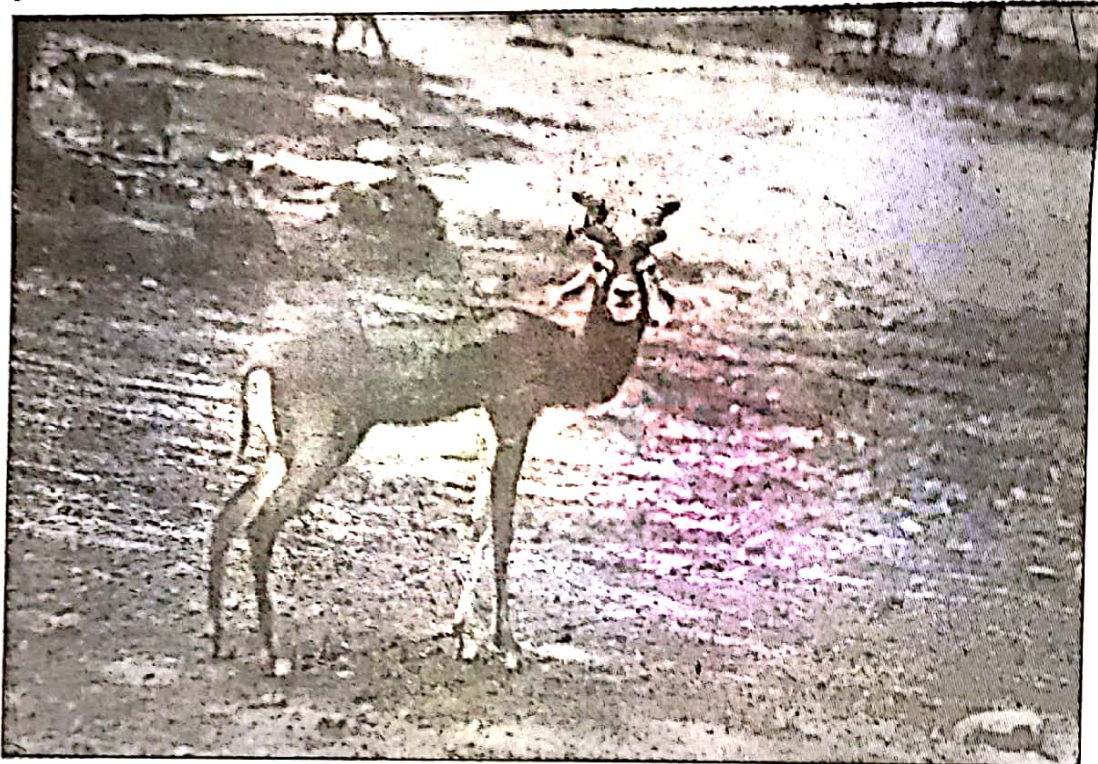


BLACKBUCK OR INDIAN ANTELOPE

Dr. Sudhakar Kar & Rajendra Panda

The graceful blackbuck or Indian Antelope (*Antelope cervicapra*) is one of the three species of Antelopes found in Orissa. The other two are

Bhetnoi are protected on socio-religious grounds by the local people. The belief that the presence of Blackbuck in the paddy fields brings prosperity to



An adult male Blackbuck with beautiful spiral horns

Nilgai or Bluebull (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) and four-horned Antelope (*Tetracerus Quadricornis*). It is locally known as 'Baliharina' or 'Kalabautia' or "Krushnasara Mriga". In the past, the species was found in Balasore, Puri and Ganjam districts and very scarcely in Bolangir and Kalahandi districts and also coastal sand dunes of Bhitarkanika and Kujanga area. At present it is confined to Konark-Balukhand coastal plains (now Konark-Balukhand Wildlife sanctuary) in Puri district and Balipadar-Bhetnoi in Ganjam district. The estimated population of Blackbucks in Orissa is about 1000 out of which, the Balipadar-Bhetnoi estimated population as per 1995 census was above 800 (Kar & Panda, 1996). The Blackbucks of Balipadar-

the local villagers has contributed substantially for the conservation of wildlife. The Balipadar-Bhetnoi has been declared as a Game Reserve by the Government of Orissa on 19.9.1989 as per the Wildlife (Protection) Act., 1972 to give legal status for the protection of this species (Blackbuck is included in the Schedule-I of the Act and endangered as per the IUCN Red Data Book 1994).

In India, the species is widespread in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamilnadu and other areas throughout peninsular India. It is one of the most popular exhibits in most of zoos of the country and elsewhere. The estimated population in India exceeds 10,000. Besides India, this species at present is found in Western Nepal where there

were 176 in 1991. It was formerly numerous in eastern deserts of Pakistan where it now occurs only as a vagrant from India in the east and south east. In addition, large feral population of Blackbucks occurs in the U.S.A. (more than 20,000 in Texas in 1988) and on the Pampas of north western and Central Argentina (Species, June 1993).

The Blackbuck is a medium sized slender antelope which stands about 80 Cm. at the shoulder and weighs about 40 Kg. The beautiful spiral horns may grow up to 50 Cm. in the South and may reach 65 Cm. or more in north India (Prater, 1990). The colour of the body coat is yellowish fawn in young and females. As the male grows older, the body colour turns into black. The intensity of black varies according to season. They are usually in herds of 20-30 in number. Blackbucks live on fresh tender leaves, grass, crops, cereals and sometimes the leaves of shrubs and trees are also taken. They graze in the morning and late afternoon, keeping hot hour of the day for rest. Blackbucks are timid by nature. Even at a slightest disturbance they are frightened. While grazing, resting and walking they frequently raise their heads with ears forward and tail upward. Keen eyesight and speed are their auto-device for self protection.

Blackbucks breed at all seasons, but the main rut takes place between February and March. Usually only one young is born at a time. The weight is about 4 Kg., length from tip to tip is about 72 Cm. and shoulder height is about 39 Cm. at birth. The longevity is about 10-15 years.

Attempts were made to rehabilitate these species into Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary during 1985-87 by introducing 14 (9 M + 5F) Zoo-bred specimens.

Due to poaching and habitat degradation, there is pressure on the population of the Blackbuck in Orissa as well as through out the country. The Wildlife Wing, Forest Department of Government of Orissa have taken all possible steps for protection and propagation of this protected species in their natural habitats. It is to note that the Wildlife Wing of the State Forest Department has taken up a research project titled 'Study on population' habitat preferences, food and feeding and survival of Blackbucks in Balipadar-Bhetnoi Game Reserve in Ganjam district, Orissa since November, 1994. This project is funded by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. The findings of this project are expected to go a long way in the conservation and management of the species in Orissa. ■

REFERENCES

1. IUCN- The World Conservation Union (1993). Species (News letter of the species survival commission) 20:41.
2. KAR, S.K. AND PANDA, R. (1996): Indian antelope. In NWCSO. News letter (May-July'96) PP.4
3. PRATER, S.H. (1990) : *The book of Indian Animals*. Bombay Natural History Society. Oxford University Press, Bombay PP. 270-271.

*o/o Chief Wildlife Warden,
Orissa, 7- Saheed Nagar,
Bhubaneswar.*

The cotton produced in Kalahandi district is of the best quality in India. Government have made a target for expansive cultivation of cotton, from 70,000 acres to one lakh acre. In the production of groundnuts, the State has recently occupied an enviable place in India. Chief Minister is of opinion that peasants/farmers should be kept away from paying Income Tax.